

Assaying the books

INTELLIGENCE IN RECENT PUBLIC LITERATURE

DONOVAN IN PERSPECTIVE

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*OSS was the most wonderful place to be young! We young ones had everything—belief, enthusiasm, opportunity, victory. Life rushed on in excitement and in confidence that we were a special group of colleagues with an important mission for our country.**

By 1 January 1983, centenary of the birth of the Agency's founder and chief of the OSS, the interested reader would find four full-length books about him. Corey Ford's *Donovan of OSS* was published in Boston in 1970 and London the following year. Thomas F. Troy's *Donovan and the CIA* was issued in 1981 by the Agency's Center for the Study of Intelligence and later that year by a commercial publisher in Frederick, Maryland. Two more works appeared in 1982: Richard Dunlop's *Donovan:—America's Master Spy* and Anthony Cave Brown's *The Last Hero:—Wild Bill Donovan*, published by Rand McNally and Times Books, respectively. With over 2,100 pages of text and four points of view at hand, it is possible for a reader not only to be caught in a maze of intelligence specialists' arguments, complex yet almost always interesting, but also, more broadly, to begin to measure the man's place within the context of American and twentieth century history. This essay is cast mainly on that general level.

Leadership: Positive and Negative Aspects

All four authors emphasize Donovan's leadership qualities, and particularly what they regard as positive results of that leadership. They praise his ability to evoke strong loyalty from his subordinates. They tell us he could inspire an employee with the feeling of working for him personally at a vital task. This message has been amply supported in several recollections of people directly associated with Donovan: Lawrence R. Houston's review of the Dunlop book published in the *Washington Times* in November 1982 was a case in point; so were the vigorously stated, upbeat comments of three OSS veterans—Louise Bushnell, Virginia Stewart, and Elizabeth McIntosh—to Headquarters personnel last spring; and Ernest Cuneo's more recent presentation to Agency military reservists added other interesting atmospherics.

* Former OSS member Caroline Bland, quoted in Dunlop, p. 307.

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These encomia to Donovan's qualities of leadership are liable to arouse in today's Agency employees a sense of relative deprivation. Some of the informal standards he set are still observed: the willingness of Agency managers to work on occasion without full financial compensation, and their tendency to shun some of the "perks" routinely demanded by their counterparts elsewhere in the federal government, reflect Donovan's own professional lifestyle. But in other ways we have changed greatly since the OSS period, and although changes were bound to occur, they have not all been improvements. The layers of bureaucracy within the organization are more numerous and less permeable. We sense the need for conferences on ethics and intelligence, and perhaps even for an ethical code for our profession, whereas his character seemed to imbue the entire OSS with something approaching an ethical consensus. The Donovan style also encouraged among the rank and file of his organization an exceptionally strong concern for the welfare of other employees. OSS under him seemed to have been a true company of colleagues.

Before lamenting too long on the golden days of the past, we should reflect on certain negative consequences of this imposing personality. All four books on Donovan show that his leadership sometimes had an adverse impact on the internal management of OSS. All four allude to a brief "palace revolution" that came to a head in February 1944, in which some of his subordinates demanded that he either travel less, or delegate more authority to his immediate subordinates, or both. Donovan, we are told, angrily rejected their recommendations and continued to rule as before.

The second negative consequence of Donovan's charismatic personality was that it sharpened the bureaucratic rivalries in which OSS (and its predecessor group the Coordinator of Information) inevitably found itself. As one of his aides recorded privately, Donovan, with all his honesty and expertise, was also "so aggressive, so scattered, so provocative" that "he excites anger." According to Ernie Cuneo, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt encouraged bureaucratic competition throughout his administration by setting up organizations with overlapping responsibilities. Donovan relished this type of challenge, and although the four authors tend to blame his rivals more than him for the use of unfair tactics, it is clear that he was eager and resourceful in "conducting ungentelemanly warfare" (Dunlop's term).

J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, for example, emerges from these four books as a villain, whose enduring enmity toward Donovan seemed greater than his dedication to the national interest. But Donovan sometimes crossed into territory clearly Hoover's responsibility, and not by accident. It is difficult to justify Donovan's authorization for his agency to break into an embassy on US territory, without even consulting the Bureau. Moreover, as long as the Bureau was assigned responsibility for collecting intelligence in Latin America, Donovan should have respected that demarcation if only to preserve the quality of what purported to be intelligence. From today's vantage point, one concludes that the national interest would have been better served if Donovan had vetted with the FBI, for its evaluation, the "top secret" information his people had obtained from Mexican communist and left-wing labor leaders on the possible presence of "one thousand" or more

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Japanese agents and covert Japanese "bases" on the Baja Peninsula. To do so, however, would have alerted Hoover to Donovan's bureaucratic transgression, and so Donovan passed the report directly to FDR.

In his relations with the US military establishment Donovan sometimes chose confrontation where a more prudent official would have sought cooperation. He decided, evidently on his own initiative, to make a top secret film report on the Pearl Harbor attack in order to find out who had been at fault. According to Dunlop he "ignored the Army and Navy's opposition" in the matter. The field photo team he sent to Hawaii was, in various ways, "brash and arrogant." Moreover, despite Secretary of War Stimson's insistence that he see the film before it was released, the head of Donovan's photographic unit tried to smuggle a large portion of the film to Donovan to be shown to FDR. The Navy managed to confiscate the film and lock it up in a vault. In retrospect, who can blame the Navy?

Pranks and Provocations

Donovan's shenanigans (the word is used advisedly) against his military rivals were sometimes provoked by them, and sometimes by him. Dunlop recounts the story of a dinner party where an admiral remarked that Donovan's organization was "a Tinker Toy outfit, spying on spies." We have Donovan's word for it, presumably, that the admiral actually did bait him that way; it is hard to imagine the admiral himself confessing to such a tactless comment, or to the aftermath. In any case Donovan rose to the bait by suggesting that his outfit "could get your secret files and blow up your ammunition dump." The admiral, of course, laughed at the suggestion. A few minutes later, Dunlop records,

Donovan excused himself from the table, presumably to go to the washroom. He telephoned his headquarters and within an hour several high-ranking Navy officers showed up at the Navy Building demanding to see the admiral. The sentry saluted and said the admiral was not in.

"Then," said one, "we'll wait in his office."

Once inside the officers went to work.

One, a safecracker, opened the safe and removed its top secret contents. Then the party left and drove to the ammunition dump, where they dressed down the officer of the day for not demanding their security clearances at the gate. When the OD left in relief, they planted dummy dynamite tubes. They sent the admiral's top secret files and a report on their activities to Donovan at the dinner party. As the party was breaking up, Donovan handed the admiral his files without comment, and explained where he could find the dummy charges at the ammunition dump. (p. 348)

Donovan was not above using meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to impress the military in unusually creative ways. Dunlop tells us of the "Hedy Lamarr" fireworks device, contrived by Stanley Lovell, the chief of OSS

Research and Development, to create a distraction for an OSS spy trying to avoid capture. All the spy had to do was pull a tiny wire loop and the device initiated the roar of a falling bomb. Donovan took Lovell to a JCS meeting, mentioned the device to his audience and moved on to other subjects. Lovell, as prearranged, pulled the ring and dropped Hedy into a metal wastebasket. "Two- and three-star generals rushed for the door as a mighty roar ended Hedy's performance."

Dunlop's book is replete with anecdotes like these, and the other three authors provide several more. Many of Donovan's pranks led to more serious consequences, but the basic point is the same: if you happened to be on Donovan's side in these episodes, or can assume that allegiance vicariously now, Donovan emerges as an exceptionally brave and clever man who deserved your loyalty. No wonder the morale in OSS was high. Yet it also should be possible to understand the resentment Donovan's peers came to feel toward him, and the seriousness of his aide's observation that "he excites anger."

Moreover, from the vantage point of a contemporary historian, there is much to be lamented in these stories. In his review of the Troy book, Notre Dame history professor Bernard Norling summarizes the bureaucratic rivalries affecting Donovan in this way:

Some forty different agencies, all of them involved in intelligence gathering in *some* way, defended their turf from the threat of encroachment with remarkable imagination and a tenacity that would have excited a bulldog. There were endless hearings, innumerable drafts and redrafts of proposals, interminable squabbles about the definitions of words, continuous efforts to either reduce or scatter the functions of OSS, endless rumors, "inspired" leaks to friendly newspapers, fierce infighting about who should be directed by whom, and resort to that final refuge of the badgered bureaucrat, additional studies.

Norling finds the bureaucratic wrangling with Donovan at the center to have been "squalid" and "appalling"—one of those aspects of World War II which should cause one to wonder what the other side was like if our side was winning. Norling has a point.

OSS Achievements, Positive and Negative

Bureaucratic wrangling notwithstanding, Donovan and the OSS did contribute to the winning of World War II, but historians are by no means certain how much. OSS intelligence activities as such are outside the scope of Troy's book. Corey Ford and Dunlop let the British provide the bottom line. Ford records that in 1966 Admiral Louis Mountbatten told OSS veterans that he doubted "whether any one person contributed more to the ultimate victory of the Allies than Bill Donovan." In the foreword to Dunlop's biography the wartime head of British intelligence in the US, Sir William Stephenson ("Intrepid"), pronounces Donovan "one of the most significant men of our century" but shows polite reservation about the organization he headed. He

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salutes the fact that by the end of the war "Donovan's OSS was comparable quantitatively with the combined efforts of British Intelligence and Special Operations Executive" and then adds that "qualitatively too, much of OSS's work was without doubt of first-class importance by any standard." That is not damning the OSS with faint praise, but the praise is cautious.

Stephenson's verdict on OSS, nevertheless, is considerably more flattering than the one offered by David Kahn in his review of the Troy, Dunlop, and Cave Brown books (Washington 19 December 1982). Kahn is of course entitled to his opinion, but he greatly confuses anyone who has read the books (he confused this reader anyway) by claiming that two of the authors support that opinion. Kahn puts it this way:

Neither Cave Brown nor Dunlop assesses the overall contribution of OSS to the war effort. The reason may be that it could not have been very great. OSS had only a handful of agents in Germany, as Joseph Persico made clear in *Piercing the Reich*, and they reported mainly low-level intelligence; neither Cave Brown nor Dunlop go into this. OSS had no agents in Japan or her captured areas.

The trouble is that Cave Brown devotes an entire chapter to an overall assessment—"Farewell the Tranquil Mind"—in which the language, in this reader's judgment, is as thoughtfully chosen and gracefully expressed as the title. Dunlop, true enough, does not offer an assessment but, as indicated above, Stephenson's preface provides a kind of summation. Regarding the "handful of agents" in Germany, whatever Persico may have thought about their number and effectiveness, it is clear that Cave Brown and Dunlop did not ignore the subject or trivialize the effort. Dunlop records that Donovan "sent more than 200 agents into Germany between September 1944 and VE Day" (p. 454). Cave Brown describes OSS penetration operations in Germany as "very large scale" and, as his treatment of Allen Dulles' efforts indicates, he considers that some were high-level. OSS, as Dunlop in particular illustrates, had numerous agents operating behind Japanese lines.

Kahn's definition of "significant" seems to be limited to the achievements in cryptanalysis which contributed to major naval and air victories such as Midway. No doubt Donovan would have accomplished more had he succeeded in adding that to his organization's capabilities. But Cave Brown surely does not dismiss OSS accomplishments as trivial. Whereas Kahn states that "the spy was of no more importance in intelligence than the foot soldier was in combat during the battle of technologies that was World War II," Cave Brown implies in his "Farewell the Tranquil Mind" chapter that (a) World War II was more than a "battle of technologies" and (b) the spy was no *less* important in intelligence than the foot soldier was in combat. Cave Brown declares that the number of decorations earned by OSS personnel for gallantry and proficiency—on the average of one for every eight employees—constitutes in itself "a tangible, remarkable achievement to the OSS's performance," and goes on to pay a special tribute to Donovan for accomplishing so much at so little cost in casualties:

Despite the magnitude of the worldwide effort engaged in by the OSS, Donovan lost fewer men killed, wounded, and captured in its

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five years than he had lost on an average week in the trenches during the campaign season of 1918. In all, 143 men and women, excluding subagents, were killed in action, and about 300 men and women were wounded or captured while on active service. Yet the damage Donovan did to the enemy in World War II was far greater than that in World War I. And here was another important demonstration of Donovan's theories: An outpouring of blood was not always necessary in order to cause the enemy severe damage. Two examples will suffice to show what is meant: The OCs who took part in Noah's Ark in Greece suffered no more than 25 dead and wounded (and none was captured). On the other hand, they paralyzed large formations of the Wehrmacht for more than eighteen months and killed or wounded at least 1,400 of the enemy. In Switzerland Dulles's information that the Germans' missile experiments had reached an advanced stage produced a devastating attack by the Royal Air Force. In turn, that attack delayed German production of operational missiles, thereby saving hundreds, if not thousands, of lives and many acres of human dwellings.

Cave Brown and Dunlop list several other OSS successes, only a few of which are acknowledged by Kahn (and those are belittled). OSS operations in France achieved more than the disruption of the rail movement of one SS division and more than the provision of fine and detailed positive intelligence on southern France; they helped to ignite the uprisings coinciding with the Allied invasion of France. Kahn also disputes Cave Brown's case for OSS's indirect role in ensuring the success of D-Day. Cave Brown's argument, spelled out at considerable length, is that OSS operations in Hungary and the Balkans tied down German divisions there long enough to prevent timely reinforcement of German defenses in Normandy. If the argument is accepted as valid then OSS must be considered to have played a role fairly comparable in its strategic consequences to the role of cryptanalysis cited by Kahn in the Battle of Midway. Kahn will have none of this. He disputes Cave Brown's contention that an OSS operation in Hungary helped to persuade Hitler of the need to occupy that country. The OSS team sent to Hungary parachuted in on 13 March 1944 and, according to Kahn, the war diary of the German high command shows that the order to occupy was issued the day before. But he misses the main elements in the story; what Cave Brown says is that the whole process of secret negotiations of several months duration between OSS and representatives of the Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian governments, designed to remove those countries from the Axis camp, became known to Hitler well before the initiation of the tactical phases of the operations (e.g. parachuting of an OSS team into Hungary). Cave Brown contends that these OSS intelligence defeats—and collectively, in his judgment, they constituted OSS's greatest failure of the war—nevertheless served to convince Hitler that the Allies intended to invade Europe from the south. "Once that idea was implanted," says Cave Brown, "there was nothing any of Hitler's military advisers could do to eradicate it."

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The lesson continues to be relevant to our profession in helping us to judge what we do in its proper context. What can be considered in strict, narrow terms as an operational failure may in the long run help to produce a strategic triumph. This may occur not only in clandestine or covert operations but also in other aspects of intelligence, especially intelligence analysis. The kindest fate of certain intelligence estimates may be that they are ultimately proven wrong because the dire message reached an intelligence consumer in time for policy action which otherwise would not have occurred. It is not always possible, of course, for those who exerted themselves to make the operation succeed, or the estimate correct, to understand matters that way. It is not always true that their superiors are wise enough to do so either.

Returning to our reflections on the Hungarian/Balkan operational failure, one wonders how wise Donovan and others were in judging it. The thought arises that perhaps he might have realized well in advance that the operations had been compromised but allowed them to go forward precisely in order to further the broader, strategic objective. He had some warnings, Cave Brown tells us, through Allen Dulles in Bern, that the Nazis might be aware of the operations, and he might also have been alerted by sources outside OSS (e.g. the so-called ISOS material). At one point Cave Brown expresses bewilderment that Donovan put the Hungarian project—Project Sparrow—on hold in view of these warnings and then, for reasons that do not immediately seem compelling, allowed it to proceed.

In the fictional world of John LeCarre the hypothesis that Donovan, in effect, intended the operation to fail but deliberately refrained from communicating as much to the OSS men directly involved would be plausible. In the real world, the reader would need far more evidence than these books on Donovan provide that such duplicity actually occurred. More likely Donovan himself became personally committed to carrying out the operation no matter what the odds. As Peter Wyden demonstrates in his *The Bay of Pigs*, it becomes increasingly difficult psychologically to halt an important operation once it is set in train, and increasingly easy to ignore positive intelligence pointing toward the likelihood that the operation will fail. If that is the way it happened in Donovan's case, he would not be the last high-ranking Western intelligence official to be caught in such a net.

Just as an intelligence failure can sometimes help produce a policy success, an apparent intelligence success can sometimes help induce adverse consequences later. The testimony that Cave Brown and to some extent Corey Ford and Dunlop provide concerning OSS relations with the Soviet intelligence services is worth some reflection. At one stage of the war, for example, FDR authorized Donovan to make direct contact with Fitin of the NKVD, and largely through the impact of Donovan's forceful personality, Fitin tentatively agreed to Donovan's terms for intelligence collaboration. Score one for US intelligence. But the very success of Donovan's approach permitted J. Edgar Hoover to warn FDR of the danger of Soviet penetration, and aroused the suspicions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well. Donovan was thereupon ordered to break off the negotiations. The effect of this abrupt change of direction can

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only have greatly increased Soviet suspicions about their putative ally, and thereby further strained an already uneasy partnership.

Nearer the end of the war OSS began to target the Soviets. One such effort, as described by Cave Brown, was Casey Jones, which Donovan planned in August 1944 and executed early the next spring. Paired with another operation, Ground Hog, and carried out jointly with the British, it was designed to "use the postwar confusion to get photo coverage of all Central and Western Europe, Scandinavia, and North Africa." Ground Hog was aimed at collecting "geological data of military interest." The questionable aspects arise from the fact that this project was begun *during* the war; that it gave priority to those areas occupied by US and British forces that were scheduled to be turned over to the Soviets; that parts of Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, and all Soviet-occupied parts of Germany were photomapped; that Casey Jones involved about 16 squadrons of US and British heavy bombers modified for aerial photography; that while some of these aircraft carried their true markings, others apparently were unmarked; and that the purpose of this project was not candidly discussed with the Soviets.

All of this must have gone down well in Washington at the time. It could be portrayed as a successful large-scale operation with no casualties. It would serve as a resolute rebuff to those who were always ready to accuse OSS of being soft on the commies. It would also serve as a good start on a postwar national intelligence service. After all, with all this important data in hand bearing on likely problems of strategic policy interest, who could doubt that a centralized organization ought to be established to preside over this vast body of newly acquired material? Zbigniew Brzezinski once remarked in *Encounter* magazine that "power not only serves policy, it tempts it." A demonstrated intelligence capability like Casey Jones becomes an argument for perpetuating that capability.

But what were the Soviets supposed to think about all this? As Cave Brown points out, they were eventually privy to some cryptic State Department requests for permission to photomap Berlin, Vienna, and Prague—but nothing about Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria nor the rest of Soviet-occupied parts of Germany. Their own spies in Britain and the US may have ferreted out some of the unadvertised goals of Casey Jones. But how were they to dismiss the likelihood that these overflights represented contingency planning for military operations against them, and the possibility that among this vast assemblage of aircraft there might be some capable of a nuclear attack—a capability the Soviets already knew that the US and Britain possessed? Cave Brown details how the Soviets both protested these encroachments of their air space and ordered their fighters on occasion to shoot at the US and British intruders. Several shooting incidents occurred prior to VE Day.

He concludes that "there can be little doubt that these operations were among the factors that caused great tensions between the Russian and Western Allies during the last weeks of the war." The judgment seems almost too mild. Let us step back a bit. In the 1950s, those of us being academically trained in international relations were told by our professors and read in our textbooks

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that all the duplicity and double dealing among the Allies during World War II and the early postwar period were the fault of the Soviet Union. Our side played it straight. Finally, in belated response to these repeated Soviet unilateral, unprovoked acts of bellicosity and espionage we began to bolster our military strength, and direct our intelligence capabilities against the Soviets. It has been hard to shake that version of history from our minds. The revisionist explanations in the late 1960s and 1970s did not make much impression because they all seemed too strident and ill-informed. Now, after reading Cave Brown's testimony presented as part of a sophisticated, thoroughly researched appraisal of the foundation of the modern American espionage establishment, we are finally compelled to revise somewhat that comfortable assumption about the origins of the Cold War.

Cave Brown's relatively calm verdict on Casey Jones contrasts with his appraisal of two examples of unilateral OSS activity within areas of British jurisdiction. Both occurred in 1945. One involved the initiation of positive intelligence collection in countries due to receive their independence, notably India and Burma. Cave Brown describes this program as "palpably the committing of espionage against a friendly power." The other required attaching to the court of King Peter II of Yugoslavia, who was benefitting from British financial support and protection in London, an OSS agent who would report independently on Peter's steadily dimming prospects for regaining his throne. Cave Brown terms this operation a "clear breach" of Anglo-American agreements not to "spy on each other." Moreover, the fact that "an act of espionage against America's leading ally" had been "sanctioned in Washington" meant that "the Grand Alliance had disintegrated and that the brilliant American comradeship of arms . . . was now at an end. Whether it was to be revised or not would remain to be seen."

Arguably Cave Brown has made too much of these two operations. They were rather modest in scale—no squadrons of bombers on photomapping missions—and were not directed at Britain itself. Moreover, the British intelligence authorities knew that the US government had looked on with generally benign neglect when the British unilaterally gathered intelligence and conducted various operations on US territory. No one should get excited about it now, but does anyone believe that the apparatus Stephenson admits to having administered in this country—"the British secret and covert organizations, all nine of them," the communications division "handling more than a million message groups a day," and so forth—was concerned solely with liaison or joint Anglo-US operations? Yet the sensitivity shown by Cave Brown, loyal subject of the Commonwealth, to the two unilateral OSS operations in the British sphere of influence is useful in underscoring how even any Soviet officials who were inclined to be friendly toward the US and Britain in 1945 must have regarded Casey Jones. Casey Jones, this writer therefore argues, was an intelligence success that contributed something to the makings of a serious strategic failure.

Representative of the Opposition

Donovan exercises controlling influence over Knox, strong influence over Stimson, friendly advisory influence over President and

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Hull. . . . Being a Republican, a Catholic and of Irish descent, he has a following of the strongest opposition to the Administration. . . . There is no doubt that we can achieve infinitely more through Donovan than through any other individual. (Quoted in Corey Ford, p.99)

So wrote the Director of British Naval Intelligence to the Commander-in-Chief, UK Mediterranean Fleet in 1940. He was urging the British admiral to welcome the man sent by FDR to see if the British could hold out against a German attack and whether, therefore, the US should begin to shed its professed neutrality and begin to supply material aid. Donovan concluded that the answer to both questions ought to be yes, thereby contradicting the view strongly advocated by the US Ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy. As a result the British obtained 50 destroyers from the US through Lend-Lease, and the US moved inexorably toward war against Germany on the side of Britain.

Professor John Lukacs of LaSalle College used to tell his history classes that the most important single fact of the first half of the Twentieth Century was that the Americans and British spoke English. He would then remind his students that great consequences can ensue from the presence of a single individual. The vote taken in the United States shortly after the Revolution to make German the official language—the country contained nearly as many of German stock as of British Isles descent at that time and the sentiment ran strong to divorce the new nation from the old master culturally as well as politically—failed by one vote. Suppose that voter had not been there. . . .

Similarly, if Donovan had not been on the scene, who else could have provided testimony of sufficient weight to override our own Ambassador's opposition to Anglo-American military partnership against Hitler? For the crucial element in Kennedy's disdainful attitude was based not on an objective assessment of British military capabilities, but on the emotional bias of an Irish Catholic American against all things English.*

Under those circumstances it was important that an equally prominent Irish Catholic American was available to speak up for the Englishmen, and contradict the Kennedy counsel. Moreover, as a Republican he was able to help neutralize the isolationist wing of that party. Other prominent Republicans were sympathetic to the British (Wendell Wilkie, for example, pledged not to oppose FDR on this issue in the 1940 presidential campaign), so that in this regard Donovan did not stand alone. But in being able and willing to contest the strong isolationist currents within two parallel constituencies, the Irish Catholic (overwhelmingly Democratic) and the Republican (overwhelmingly Protestant), Donovan was unique.

Lawrence Houston, in his Washington *Times* review of the Dunlop book, is troubled by the "impression" conveyed by Dunlop that "Donovan, almost single-handed, turned the American public from isolation to intervention

* "I hate all of those goddamned Englishmen from Churchill down," he told an American while he was still Ambassador. Quoted in David E. Koskoff, *Joseph F. Kennedy: A Life and Times* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1974).

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against the Germans in World War II.” Houston counters this by citing a 1952 book coauthored by William Langer, Donovan’s head of Research and Analysis, *The Challenge to Isolation*, which contains only four references to Donovan, “none of them showing him in a major role.”

To this objection one must respond that Houston is correct in understanding Dunlop’s message, but then Corey Ford conveys the same “impression,” and it is supported by influential British spokesmen such as the above quoted Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Director of British Naval Intelligence, and Stephenson. Secondly, the Langer book concerns mainly Republican Party isolationism, and does not take seriously the importance of anti-British sentiment within ethnic groups. Langer’s strength—one of the reasons he was so useful as head of Research and Analysis—was his ability to interpret the broad currents of world history as understood in traditional terms. The 1952 work appeared when US history was also being told in rather traditional terms, which tended to slight the role of minorities. The role of Irish Catholicism in complicating the course of US history was not addressed by mainstream historians of that period; to them one’s Irish Catholic heritage was something to be outgrown, like acne.

Corey Ford, Dunlop, and Cave Brown have thus provided a needed corrective in emphasizing that Donovan did not outgrow it, and that at a crucial juncture of US and world history Donovan’s role was enhanced by it. Corey Ford and Dunlop show, moreover, that Donovan suffered discrimination in his occasional forays into politics from those who were anti-Irish and anti-Catholic, and also, ironically, from Irish Catholics who accused him of selling out that heritage. Some Irish Catholics spread rumors that Donovan was not a good Catholic. These rumors have proved sufficiently pervasive over the years to have been transformed into the assertion (e.g. in Joseph O’Grady’s *How the Irish Became Americans*) book that Donovan was Protestant.

On occasions other than the Lend Lease episode Donovan tried to use his Irish Catholic background to help the British. Dunlop tells us of Donovan’s March 1941 trip to Dublin undertaken “at the request of Roosevelt and Churchill.” At that time the threat of German invasion of the British Isles, possibly preceded by invasion of Ireland, had receded, but it still seemed critical, from the British point of view, that the Irish Free State allow Great Britain to use its ports to counter German submarines. Donovan tried unsuccessfully to induce the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Eamon de Valera to make that commitment to the Allied cause. The luncheon meeting attended by Donovan, de Valera, and the head of the Catholic Church in Ireland did not pass pleasantly. As Dunlop put it: “Donovan was incensed when the prelate remarked that he did not see much difference between a Nazi victory and British dominion, and he blistered the churchmen with his opinion of the anti-British myopia shown by some Irish.”

Only a distinguished Irish Catholic American could have delivered such a dressing down. Dunlop records that Churchill was pleased with Donovan’s trip to Dublin and well he should have been. For at a minimum Donovan’s position must have shaken de Valera’s certainty that the vast Irish American

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hinterland was behind his aggressively anti-British neutrality. For the rest of the war de Valera's neutrality tilted toward the Allies—for example, downed German fliers were interned for the duration of the war, whereas downed US and British fliers were promptly released. Had the Irish cardinal's view of neutrality gone unrefuted, the story might have ended differently.

Dunlop also illustrates how Donovan and the OSS suffered in the Washington bureaucratic infighting from accusations that they were too pro-British. When Donovan's proposal to continue the OSS function after the war was leaked to the media, the "leakees", principally the *Chicago Tribune*, were those who consistently pandered to anti-British sentiments among their consumers.

Roots

Cave Brown offers a perspective on Donovan's Irish Catholic background that differs markedly from what is said in Corey Ford and Dunlop, though he agrees with them that it forms an important part of Donovan's political biography. On this aspect of Donovan, Cave Brown's judgments seem to have been formed with a carelessness quite untypical of the rest of his book. To wit:

Item: He underplays the fact that Donovan's grandparents came from one of the areas of Ireland hardest hit by the Famine. Joseph Kennedy's grandparents came from Ireland at the same time. The perceived legacy of that experience was very strong and long lasting; a high ranking US officer of recent memory was known to remark to friends that he had bad teeth because the British had starved his grandfather in the Famine. The passage across the Atlantic in "coffin ships" intensified the bitter memory. Cave Brown is ludicrously inaccurate in suggesting that because the Donovans traveled on ships of British registry their accommodations must have been superior to those provided by other countries. Terry Coleman (*Passage to America*) is only one of several historians who have compared those accommodations, unfavorably, to those afforded African slaves.

Item: Having failed to appreciate how strong feelings about the Famine would persist in any family that survived it, Cave Brown lurches to the opposite extreme by professing to find a "Fenian" element in the Donovan household when Donovan was growing up. "Fenian" properly connotes an active participant in a conspiracy to destroy British rule in Ireland by armed force. It is surely stretching that term to apply it to the Donovan family. True, young Donovan recited poems by James Clarence Mangan, who longed to lead "the brilliant Irish hosts" into battle, and the enemy Mangan envisioned was the "old Saxon foe." It is likely, also, that the newly arrived Irish immigrants who visited the Donovan household in the 1880s and 1890s found that enmity toward England was not discouraged by the country of their adoption. (British Isles immigrants were, in fact, required to swear on their preprinted citizenship certificates that they renounced allegiance to not only every foreign potentate, but especially the "QUEEN OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND"—an oath to which this writer's County Derry grandfather, for example, subscribed with evident joy.) But Donovan's brother Vincent, as

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quoted by Corey Ford, surely had it right in suggesting that his brother's "dream of leading an Irish regiment into battle" had been fulfilled when he would "command the bravest of them all, the Fighting Irish of New York's 69"—for the US, not for Ireland, and as Britain's ally, not her enemy.*

Item: Having ascribed a "Fenian" family environment to Donovan, Cave Brown is somewhat at a loss to explain how Donovan and the British got along so well together when they first met during World War I. Cave Brown's solution has been to offer as a plausible scenario (on pp. 30-35 of his book and in remarks made in January 1983 on a local TV station) that British intelligence recruited Donovan to spy on the Germans during World War I and then essentially put his name in the files until Stephenson re-activated him, so to speak, in 1940. Troy has taken out after Cave Brown in his newsletter (*Foreign Intelligence Literary Scene*, February 1983), arguing that Cave Brown has greatly misconstrued a passage in Troy's book. Troy says the absolute minimum about Donovan's Irish Catholic background in that book, no doubt because he does not consider it germane to his story of bureaucratic warfare—though arguably some of the vigor with which Donovan pursued these battles, and perhaps much of the protectiveness and personal attention he displayed toward his own rank-and-file, were typical of what one might expect of a latter-day Celtic chieftain. In any case Troy realizes that to label Donovan as a British spy, without conclusive proof, is to slander Donovan as an American and as an Irish Catholic.

Item: Having allowed for the strong possibility that Donovan had worked for British intelligence prior to World War II, Cave Brown seems surprised at Donovan's lack of docility toward the British during the war. He invokes the authority of certain unnamed British officials that Donovan continued to display certain "Fenian" tendencies during the war. Cave Brown presumably is referring to those occasions when Donovan objected to attempts by the British to control all OSS intelligence activities in the European Theater of Operations. Ed Sayle, curator of the CIA Historical Intelligence Collection, called to this writer's attention a memorandum from Donovan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in which he observed, *inter alia*, that the British had developed "the habit of control" over other countries' intelligence services in physical proximity to theirs "through their relations with refugee governments and refugee intelligence services." But, as Donovan stressed, "we are not a refugee government." Sayle's comment is that Donovan's argument was not the emotional outpouring of one's ethnic ancestral juices, but the properly reasoned statement of an American patriot. Perhaps; but this writer would wager that some Britons at the time might have judged otherwise, and that the Irish Catholic in Donovan made his pencil bite into the paper as he drafted those words. In any case, Donovan showed himself here and on other occasions to be anything but a British agent. He was at most what some Russians refer to

* Even as a boy, Dunlop records, Donovan was willing to side with a "narrow back" if he thought that boy was being unfairly bullied. "Narrow back"—still used in some Irish Catholic neighborhoods—neatly encapsulates a set of ethnic, religious, and class distinctions, referring primarily to a Protestant of British Isles descent who has inherited affluence. Donovan, in other words, had learned at an early age to judge situations objectively and act on those convictions.

Donovan

as a *doveritel'naya svyaz'*—an influential person in one country who has come to believe that the national interests of his or her country usually coincide with those of another country, and therefore might be counted on to give favorable consideration to a request for assistance. Donovan's relationship with the British was of that kind. And the argument itself—"we are not a refugee government"—was worth making, not just to deal with the immediate problem, but for the longer term good relationship between the intelligence services of the US and Britain.

The Last Hero?

Except for the foregoing, Cave Brown is generous to Donovan in his overall evaluation of the man himself and the organization he created. It is as appropriate for him to quote Eisenhower's tribute to Donovan as "the last hero" as it is petty for David Kahn to dispute the appellation. One would hope that more Americans might achieve as much for their country as Donovan did, but one comes away from these four books with doubts about that. The world has become so complex and compartmentalized that it is difficult for any one individual to distinguish oneself as much as Donovan, in personal bravery, intellectual advancement, and broad political and military influence, or to have such achievements as widely acclaimed in positive terms. As a nation, moreover, we have grown more suspicious of would-be heroes, even though sometimes we regret that we are so cynical. In some sense, then, the epitaph in the old language of Donovan's grandparents does apply: *Ni bheidh a leitheidi arts ann*. "We shall not look upon their like again."